



**Zeke's Island Reserve
Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, October 24, 2018, 10 am
Fort Fisher Recreation Area Education Room**

Attendance

<u>LAC Partner Organization Members</u>	<u>Present</u>
Division of Archives and History, Billy Ray Morris	No
Division of Parks and Recreation – FFRA, Jessica Sutton	Yes
NC Aquarium at Fort Fisher, Renee Weeks	Yes
Natural Heritage Program, Judith Ratcliffe	No
<u>Community Members</u>	
Steve Rice	Yes
Angela Marshall	No
Devon Eulie	Yes
<u>Others Present</u>	
Hope Sutton, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Stewardship Coordinator/Southern Sites Manager	

Welcome – Hope Sutton

The site manager welcomed the committee to the Fall 2018 meeting and reviewed the agenda. The site manager shared materials from a brief orientation for new committee members that occurred prior to the regular meeting.

Reserve-wide Administrative Update – Hope Sutton

The Reserve-wide Update, which now includes a range of Reserve activities was shared with committee members prior to the meeting.

- *Hurricane Florence and Tropical Storm Michael*

All Reserve sites and the Kitty Hawk, Beaufort, and Wilmington offices closed September 11 in preparation for Hurricane Florence. The Columbia office closed September 13. The eye of Hurricane Florence passed directly over the Masonboro Island and Zeke's Island Reserves on September 14.

The Kitty Hawk and Columbia offices received little to no damage as a result of the storm and reopened September 17. The Beaufort office at the NOAA Beaufort Lab sustained a variety of damage and fully reopened September 28. The Wilmington office at University of North Carolina Wilmington's (UNCW) Center for Marine Science also sustained a variety of damage and reopened to staff on October 1. Damage assessment and repair is handled by the respective partners that own the office facilities and not by Reserve staff; thank you to NOAA Beaufort Lab and UNCW staff for getting the facilities up and running again so that more regular business operations could resume.

Storm impacts to the Reserve sites varied geographically based on the track of the storm. The Currituck Banks, Kitty Hawk Woods, Buxton Woods, and Buckridge Reserves received little to no damage. The remaining sites located in the central and southern portions of the state experienced the following general impacts: erosion and deposition on oceanfront and estuarine shorelines, grounded vessels at the Rachel Carson and Masonboro Island Reserves, significant accumulation of marine debris such as lumber, staircases, floating docks and pilings, downed trees, missing signs, and damage to the boardwalk at the Rachel Carson Reserve. Eight of the ten Reserve sites reopened on September 24 following site assessments; Permuda Island and Bald Head Woods Reserves remain closed at this time.

Potentially hazardous conditions associated with storm damage remain at the Reserve sites and visitors should exercise caution. Grounded vessels are being addressed under Emergency Support Function #10 staffed by the U.S. Coast Guard, NOAA, N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, and N.C. Department of Environmental Quality, including Reserve staff. Pollutants and a subset of vessels that remain grounded will be removed from the Reserve sites under this operation. Visitors should refrain from disturbing the vessels to protect personal safety and respect vessel owners' personal property while removal efforts are underway. Clean-up of smaller marine debris items has begun with the help of volunteers at select sites while storm recovery funding sources are being explored for removing the larger marine debris items described above and addressing the downed trees.

Reserve programming was and continues to be impacted by the storm. K-12 student field trips, teacher workshops, public education programming, and Coastal Training Program workshops have been cancelled, postponed, and rescheduled. Research staff are measuring storm impacts on several current research projects including performance of marsh sills and living shorelines constructed of alternative substrates. Water quality monitoring equipment remained deployed at the Masonboro Island and Zeke's Island Reserves during the storm and staff will be evaluating October 17, 2018 those data in the near future. Stewardship staff are addressing the site-related items described above.

No additional impacts were observed from Tropical Storm Michael.

- *Local Advisory Committees*

In August 2018, the Secretary of the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality appointed new community members and re-appointed community members interested in continuing to serve

to the local advisory committees following an application process earlier in the year to fill vacancies. Additional government agencies were also appointed to fill gaps on the committees. The local advisory committee Operating Procedures document is to be updated every five years according to the Operating Procedures. An update was originally planned for fall 2018 but has been rescheduled to spring 2019 as staff focus on Hurricane Florence recovery.

- *Periodic Rules Review*

Per the Division’s request, the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality is seeking the Rules Review Commission’s approval of a readoption timeline of November 30, 2021 for Coastal Reserve rules (15A NCAC 070). This item is scheduled for the Rules Review Commission’s November 2018 meeting. Staff will begin preliminary discussions regarding 15A NCAC 070.0202 at the fall 2018 meetings. This work is part of the Legislative Periodic Review and Expiration of Existing Rules process (G.S. 150B-21.3A).

- *N.C. NERR Management Plan*

The Reserve received feedback from NOAA on the draft management plan for the N.C. National Estuarine Research Reserve that will cover 2018-2023 in late August 2018. Staff are currently working to address the feedback. Review by the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality will follow. A 30-day public comment period for the draft management plan will be scheduled after all reviews are complete and 3 public meetings, in the northern, central and southern regions of the coast, will be scheduled during the comment period.

- *Federal Budget*

The budget table below is a summary of the current status of the federal budget* for fiscal years 17, 18, and 19 as it relates to the Coastal Reserve.

Federal Budget Lines	Final Omnibus Appropriations FY2017	Final Omnibus Appropriations FY2018	President’s Budget Request FY2019	Senate Approps Committee Mark FY2019	House Approps Committee Mark FY2019
NERRS Operations	\$23.5 M	\$25 M	\$0 M	\$27.5 M	\$27 M
CZM Grants	\$70 M	\$75 M	\$0 M	\$90 M	\$75 M

- Federal Fiscal Year 19: The President’s budget request does not include funding for the NERRS Operations or the CZM Grants budget lines. Next steps for the federal fiscal year 19 budget include the House and Senate conferencing between the chambers, chamber votes to agree on a final budget, and a final budget going to the President for signature into law.
- Thank you to the National Estuarine Research Reserve Association and Friends of the Reserve for their work to educate Congress on the value of the national system and the NCNERR.

- *State Budget*

The N.C. General Assembly appropriated \$2.5M to the Division in the State Fiscal Year 18 budget for acquisition of the Sunset Beach West tract to be included in the Bird Island Coastal Reserve. The early stages of the acquisition are underway. The appropriation supports implementation of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Town of Sunset Beach and Sunset Beach and Twin Lakes, INC to resolve a legal battle regarding the tract. The tract is adjacent to the Bird Island Coastal Reserve and includes similar pristine beach and salt marsh habitats.

- *Visitor Access Study*

Reserve Site Managers are working with a team of researchers from UNCW (Environmental Science Department, School of Health, Applied Human Science Recreation, Tourism Management Program) to implement a visitor access assessment project at select Reserve sites titled "Understanding Access and Visitor Use on North Carolina's Coastal Reserve System." The project focuses on six of the ten Reserve sites – Bird Island, Zeke's Island, Masonboro Island, Rachel Carson, Kitty Hawk Woods, and Currituck Banks. The goal of the project is to understand visitor access patterns and inform planning and projects to accommodate visitor access of the sites. Interviews and stakeholder sessions with community members and government and business leaders, and on-site surveys of visitors are complete. Data collected will be analyzed by the research team and a study report will be complete in 2019. Results will be used by Reserve staff to inform visitor access management and planning.

- *Upcoming Program Activities*

Find upcoming event information on the event calendar at www.nccoastalreserve.net.

- NOAA Tools Training Workshop (11.6, Wilmington) - Participants will learn about NOAA's resources available to improve local decision-making. Participants will get hands-on experience with various tools, including the Sea Level Rise Viewer and the Coastal Flood Exposure Mapper, as well as learn about resources available through NOAA's Digital Coast. American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) will receive 4 Certification Maintenance credits. Registration is required.
- Low Impact Development Basics for Water Quality Protection - Workshop for Real Estate Professionals (12.4 and 12.5, Wilmington) - Participants will learn the following: how land use decisions impact water quality; Low Impact Development techniques that help protect water quality; the costs and benefits of implementing LID; managing stormwater control measures to meet state and local regulations and to maintain functionality and aesthetics; and tour stormwater control measures on the Wrightsville Beach Loop. Real estate professionals will receive 4 elective continuing education credits from the N.C. Real Estate Commission. Registration is required.

* The federal fiscal year is October 1-September 30. The National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS) budget line provides funding to the 29 reserves within the System through cooperative agreements that are matched by the states, and supports national coordination of programs and implementation of system-wide and competitive projects. The Coastal Zone

Management (CZM) grants budget line provides funding to coastal states with approved coastal management programs through cooperative agreements that are matched by the states. The Division of Coastal Management (DCM) receives funding from both budget lines to operate the N.C. National Estuarine Research Reserve (NCNERR) and N.C. Coastal Management Program. The CZM grant funds DCM receives provides funding for Reserve staffing, state site operations, and administrative support.

Site Update and Old Business – Hope Sutton

Periodic Rules Review –

- Members were introduced to five topics under consideration for addition or revision as part of the Legislative Periodic Rules Review and Expiration of Existing Rules process (G.S. 150B-21.3A) that began in 2016. These topics are: Currituck Banks Reserve parking lot, abandoned vessels, personal property, special use authorization, and permit hunts. Members were asked to comment on each topic and asked if any additional topics should be considered. Committee members discussed the topics and provided general support for further development of rule language associated with the topics. The site manager explained that rule language would be presented at future meetings.

General site conditions –

- Research activities have continued as usual with no problems or interruptions with the exception of a period around Hurricane Florence. Illegal camping and littering on Zeke's Island proper appear to have decreased since installation of signage in problematic areas. Signs will need to be replaced periodically due to damage from firearms.

Hurricane impacts –

- One of the two water quality instruments typically deployed within the Zeke's Island Reserve continuously was removed from the water prior to the arrival of Hurricane Florence while the other remained in place. This approach was chosen to limit the potential loss of both devices while allowing for high quality data to be recorded during the storm. Initial analysis of storm data show some interesting effects of large quantities of fresh water entering the system from upstream and higher overall water levels for an extended period of time. Fort Fisher Recreation Area staff reported the loss of several sea turtle nests, minor erosion, and the deposition of significant quantities of wrack on the ocean beach portion of the Reserve. Small to medium-sized marine debris was deposited on the river-facing shoreline of Zeke's Island proper. No vessels or large dock sections were identified.

Invasive plant treatment –

- Reserve staff visited the white poplar stand and determined that previous treatment had little effect. Another round of treatment is scheduled for November.

Access study – update provided within the Reserve-wide update

New Business – Hope Sutton

- None

Roundtable

- Ms. Weeks reported that the Aquarium conducted eight canoe trips with 117 participants at Zeke's Island through the season. She stated that some trips included crabbing or seine netting off the beach adjacent to the boat ramp and that use of that area has increased over time.

Public comments

- None

Action Items

- Reserve staff will contact committee members during the winter to establish a date for the spring meeting.